

Dear Members of the Appropriations Committee:

My name is Lorena Mitchell and I am a resident of New Haven. I also work as an emergency room social worker at the Department of Veterans in West Haven where I provide care to veterans experiencing acute psychiatric and substance use crises. Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the veterans I work with experience persistent and chronic housing instability which compounds the impact of their disabilities. As a frontline worker serving veterans experiencing mental illness, substance use disorders, and housing instability, **I am writing to ask you to prioritize and fund solutions to homelessness.** We must adjust the budget for FY23 through **HB 5037** to fund our frontline workers, expand the Coordinated Access Network, increase the number of Rental Assistance Program vouchers, and establish an eviction prevention partnership.

Our state officials have paid lip service to frontline workers throughout the pandemic, but it's time to meaningfully invest in these workers. Let's demonstrate through our funding priorities that we value this work. **It is imperative that our state leaders allocate an additional \$13.34 million to provide homeless and housing service organizations funding for adequate wages, benefits, and profession development.** During the Omicron wave this past January, I was so close to quitting my job in the emergency room. I was fed up with a work environment that was consistently short staffed and overworked. Many of my coworkers did quit or moved to private sector jobs that afforded them safer and more sustainable work conditions. The bottom line is if we do not invest in our frontline workers, we will lose them. Our workers serving some of the most vulnerable residents in our state need fair wages and dignified working conditions – we must provide the funding to achieve this.

Additionally, **our state leaders must establish an eviction prevention program** – this is an obvious solution to our homelessness crises! The downstream impact of a single eviction is hard to wrap your head around. Just the other day, I was working with a veteran who came into the emergency room with worsening PTSD symptoms in part due to the stress of being served an eviction notice. His symptoms were severe enough that he required hospitalization which in turn led to lost wages and time away from his family. If the legal proceedings continue and he is evicted, he will likely need to enter the shelter system which will further exacerbate his PTSD, make it harder for him to maintain employment, and put stress on his family relationships. Beyond the individual consequences for this veteran, as a society we will spend more money rehousing this veteran and providing government funded emergency healthcare, all which could be avoided by upstream interventions targeting eviction prevention. I hope that this veteran will not face that situation, but I know that for too many people in our state this is a familiar storyline.

Thank you for your leadership and I hope I can count on you to prioritize solutions to end homelessness in our state.

Sincerely,



Lorena Mitchell
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